

gainfully employed
in limbo

craig kilodney



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GAINFULLY
EMPLOYED
IN
LIMBO

CRAD
KILDNEY

Crad Kildney

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limbo: 1. A region on the edge of hell
to which are consigned the souls of
the righteous who died before the
coming of Christ and the souls of
infants who died before baptism.
2. A place of neglect or oblivion
to which unwanted or worthless
persons or things are relegated and
forgotten. 3. A place of confinement;
a prison.

GAINFULLY EMPLOYED IN CANADA

I presented myself at the Lucky Nigger Employment Agency one day. A grey-suited young man looked over my application, clicking his pen between his teeth.

"I'm looking for a writing job," I said, "even though I've only worked ordinary jobs before. So far I've been writing for little or no money. Now I'd like to get paid for my talent." He turned the paper over, looking for evidence of my talent. "I've published a lot of stories in magazines," I said.

He looked up eagerly. "Any famous ones?"

"What?"

"Any famous ones, like?"

I thought a moment. "I wrote a story for *Prism International* some years ago called 'Forget That Grapefruit; Here Come The Midgets.' It was one of my best."

"Was it a big seller?"

"A big seller?"

"Like, you know, popular?"

I didn't know what to say. "Yeah, really popular," I answered.

"I think I have a job for you." He took an index card out of a little card file on his desk. "It's not exactly a writing job, but it requires a prestige-type individual with experience in the writing situation."

"Okay, good."

"It's only temporary, but the pay is forty bucks a day."

"Sounds okay. What do I have to do?"

"You have to go to Dave Delville's Sunoco Station at 1623 Avenue Road and sing a song he wrote."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't have all the details. Why don't you go see him and talk it over?"

I drove to Delville's Sunoco Station. Dave was in the middle of a lube job.

"I'm here about the job. The Lucky Nigger Agency sent me."

"Oh, yeah, right. Come into the office."

We went inside the office. I bought a penny gum ball from a machine marked 'Help Amputees of the Russo-Japanese War' to show my heart was in the right place.

"I wrote a song some time ago," said Dave. "I tried to get it recorded after I did that TV commercial for Sunoco with Tieu Leek."

"Oh, yeah, I remember. That's where Tieu Leek interviews you here at the station, and you say, 'My wife says I'd sleep here if I could.'"

"Uh huh. If you saw my wife, you'd understand. But about this song. I need a high-prestige person to sing it to customers as they drive in. Maybe if enough of them hear it, there'll be a demand for it. Or maybe a record producer will drive in and sign me to a contract." He sighed, looking out the window. Snow was beginning to fall. It was about 5 p.m. Avenue Road was already choked with rush hour traffic. "You only go around once in life, and you've got to live it with all the gusto you can."

"Yeah, I know."

He took a piece of paper out of a drawer. The words were written in large, careful script. "I'll sing it for you once so you know the tune, but if you can improve the tune, I don't mind. Here goes:

Hot bingo porkway

Hot bingo, yours to enjoy

Hot bingo porkway

Now you bite-ee my nose

And you bite-ee my toes.

"That's it. I only thought up one verse."

"Where do you want me to sing it?"

"Out by the pumps. If they ask you for gas, just tell them you're not the attendant, you're just the singer. I hope you've had some experience in entertainment."

"I once wrote a story for a magazine called *Prism International*."

"That's good. People in prisons need good stories to read. Tell you what. If you sing till closing time--that's seven--I'll pay you for a whole day. Then you can continue at six tomorrow morning. We can talk over pensions and

vacations and medical coverage and all that stuff after you've tried the job out."

"Okay, what the hell. I'll give it a go."

I took the song sheet outside and stood by the pumps. An attendant was already filling up a car. I motioned to the driver to roll down his window.

"Stamps?" he said.

"No. You want to hear a song? Here it is:

*Hot bingo porkway
Hot bingo, yours to enjoy
Hot bingo porkway
Now you bite-ee my nose
And you bite-ee my toes.*"

I improved the tune a little.

That night, Pierre Trudeau made a speech on TV on how we should all improve the economy and the quality of life by working hard. "Gainful employment is what makes our society what it is," he said.

I knew exactly what he meant.

OFFICE WORKER'S DREAMS

Modern Facilities

When I ask in the office where the men's room is, the middle-aged secretary tells me it's upstairs "under the sign, almost directly overhead." I go upstairs and find the second floor to be an empty framework of wooden beams, like a house under construction. In the corner I see a sign: "MEN." There is nothing under it. No toilet. No door. Nothing. I am greatly disturbed but must relieve myself immediately. I look around. Am I to do it here? Is this what is done in this company? I've never seen such a thing before. I look at the floor and see that it is wet. There is a smell of urine. Apparently, this is where men relieve themselves! Astonishing! What is also astonishing is that there are cracks between the floor boards. I can see the office where I was a minute ago. The women are at their desks right below me. The secretary who directed me is smoking a cigarette and coding orders. I can wait no longer! I unzip myself and after a moment of self-consciousness, I begin to release a strong, healthy stream of piss. It spatters warmly on the floor. Then I hear a voice scream, "Jesus Christ! There's piss coming down through the ceiling!" An uproar spreads through the office, but I can't stop. The piss goes on and on and on! I hear footsteps from across the floor. It is the president of the company, leading a prospective client by the arm. I hear him say, "I want to assure you we have the most modern facilities."

Term of Employment Determined By Pens

I report to work ten minutes early, as my supervisor has requested. He shows me which desk I am to occupy. Then he hands me an attractive pen--the opaque, non-retractable kind.

"I am not only the Supervisor but also Central Pen Control. Here is your first pen. It is the only kind of pen you may use, and you may only use it here at the office. Under our rules, you cannot quit your job until your pen

runs out of ink. If your pen *does* run out of ink, you will be fired if you cannot obtain a new one. There are twelve employees in this office. Each one has been given a pen. Each employee may obtain one replacement pen from me every two months but no more than five during any calendar year, and he may obtain a replacement under this provision even if his pen has not run out of ink. Also, I hide twelve pens in various secret places in the office on the first of the year and one additional pen on the first of each month. Now, it is possible to possess more than one pen, but all pens are not necessarily full. Since they are opaque, you cannot be sure how much ink is left. Also, these pens have a special design and serial number so that you can't go to a store and buy them. You can only get them from me, and it is impossible to steal them. Pens may be bought and sold among employees. If you lose your pen, you'd better find one or buy one, or you can get one from me if it's been more than two months. Now, to avoid theft, you get your pen from your pen locker in my office in the morning and deposit it there at the end of the day. Persons finding hidden pens, however, are not required to declare them but usually do in order to make them available for sale, sometimes for fifty dollars or more. Also, spare pens acquired in this manner invariably remain in the office because the person would want it as insurance in case he lost his. Now, if you want to leave your job, you must not have any spare pens left. You cannot sell them just to be able to leave, but you can sell your spares and then wait till the one you have runs out of ink. Now, some employees like to trade pens for fun, since no one knows which pen is fuller, but you have to watch out for some of these tricksters who look for the first indication of a pen's running dry and then trade it off on an unsuspecting employee. However, if you *want* to leave your job, you might want to acquire such a pen, sell your others, and then let the near-empty pen run out on you. Now, one thing I don't allow is scribbling on a pad to make your pen run out. That ink was put there to do useful work. Another thing you cannot do is hold a dry pen. You must declare it to be dry and give it to me for disposal. I have the right to check every pen on your person to see that it still works. One other thing is making small marks on pens to indicate their age, which is okay and legal. Many employees

like to do that when they find a pen or get a new one from me. For instance, they make one scratch for January, two for February, and so on. This way, pens in circulation are of a known age, but of course they may not have been in use continuously. And under the scratch system it is easy to add scratches to make the pen seem newer and thus make it more valuable to sell. Now, in the case where a pen is damaged by being sat on or melted on the hot plate..."

The Impact of Goodness

I am opening the morning mail while my boss is in his office with the door closed. The light on my extension phone tells me he is busy making more big deals. From these run-down offices on top of a luncheonette, he operates numerous businesses: Youth-Aid Health Products, Lucky Charms, the Correspondence College of Song-Writing, Sub-Arctic Land Developments, the International Theosophy Institute, Madame Zena (Spiritual Counselor), Save The Children of Fernando Po, the Contest-Lovers' Club, and Dr. Goodman's Marital Aids. And those are the ones I know about.

I separate the day's receipts into folders--one for each business. Complaints are set aside for him to glance at and then throw out. Utility bills, dunning notices from suppliers and printers, and letters from various consumer and government agencies go into yet another folder marked "No Reply Necessary."

Today an unusual letter has come in the mail, along with a \$15.00 cheque made out to Youth-Aid. It is from a Mrs. Everson or Emerson or something like that, in a nursing home in Mississippi. The handwriting is extremely shaky, but it seems to read:

Dear Sir,

Awhile back I sent a check for \$30.00 for the 3 ounce jar of Miracle Youth Cream... (illegible)... got the 6 ounce jar instead. In your ad it says the 6 ounce jar is \$45.00. Now I am... (illegible)... keep it or return it... (illegible)... send you the difference of \$15.00.

A very happy customer,
Mrs. A. Everson (?)

I put this letter on top of the Youth-Aid mail. I want my boss to see it first. He's sure to find it amusing. I take all the folders, knock gently on his door, let myself in, and place the folders before him on the desk. He is on the phone, saying to someone, "...just the way we did in L.A. The contractor digs the hole and disappears, and we split the customer's money...Yeah...Exactly...What can they do? Nothing..."

I return to my desk and browse through the newspaper.

Five minutes later, I hear his door open. He comes out, tears streaming down his face. He has Mrs. Everson's letter and cheque in his hand. Voice cracking, he says to me, "Thank God...there is still...some honesty...left in this world!"

Upward Mobility

My throat dry, I knock on the Sales Manager's door. I hear him bark, "Come in!"

I enter and close the door behind me. Mr. Allen is smoking one of his fifty-cent cigars although it is only 9:30 in the morning. The sleeves of his white shirt are rolled back. There is a plain, white towel on his desk blotter. "Sit down." He beckons me to the chair beside his huge mahogany desk. The desk and shelves are cluttered with expensive accessories. Behind him are the large framed photos of his severe-looking father and his even severer-looking grandfather.

"Move your chair around here. Don't be shy," he says with a wink. His shoes and socks are off, his trousers are rolled up. There is a basin of grey, soapy water on the floor. I am now sitting directly facing him behind the desk. My tie is choking me.

He blows a stream of smoke vertically by curling his lower lip. "I hope you know I'm giving you the first shot at moving up to a better territory."

"Thanks, Mr. Allen. It's more than I expected."

"Your sales figures are good. More than I thought possible for the Yukon." He grins. "Feel lucky?"

"I don't know."

"Okay, have a go at it." I hesitate. "Go ahead. They're clean."

I lean down and look at his two newly-washed feet. Each of his toes represents a different territory, but I have no way of knowing which. I am required to pick one of his toes and...and put it in my mouth.

Steeling myself, I separate his left little toe slightly and put my lips around it. Then I look up and await the verdict.

He laughs, tapping the ash of his cigar. "Hoo! Hoo! Oh, boy! Jesus, do I feel sorry for you, ha ha! You picked the same lousy territory!"

"NO!"

"Jeez, I'm sorry, Phil." Then he leans forward confidentially and puts his hand on my shoulder. "Your shyness worked against you. You thought the smallest toe would be the least unpleasant." I nod. "My boy," he continues, giving me a pat of encouragement, "if you want to advance quickly in the world of business, you must not be afraid to take the boss's big toe in your mouth and suck on it."

Organic Sense

I am sitting at a desk by a window facing a crumbling brick building and an alley full of garbage. I am stuffing envelopes with a Gestation Table For Domestic Animals. They are being sent to a mailing list of persons responding to a magazine ad (*LONELY? LIKE TO GET MAIL? TEN DOLLARS BRINGS YOU INTERESTING MAIL FOR LIFE!*).

When my supervisor comes by, I give him the batch just completed. Then I say, "Excuse me, sir, but I think you should know these gestation tables are all wrong. I just noticed. They must have got scrambled at the printer's or something."

"Oh, really? How do you know?"

"I did two years of animal husbandry at Michigan State. Here, take this for example. The gestation and incubation period for a buffalo--twenty-seven days. Obviously that's not right. It's more like two hundred and seventy days."

"Did you finish your degree at Michigan State?"

"No, I just did two years."

"Well, then, I'd go by the table as it is."

"Are you kidding? Do you think a buffalo can give birth in twenty-seven days?"

"It's not for me to say. I'm just the mail room supervisor."

"But--"

"Just keep doing what you're doing and don't worry about it."

"But it's wrong!"

He sighs, then leans against my desk. "All right, look, even if it is wrong, there's nothing I can do about it. I just do what they tell me."

"Then how will it ever get straight?"

"Well..." He hesitates. "These things get straightened out eventually. There are self-correcting processes out there in the world for things like this. Like, for instance, a guy expects to have a baby buffalo in twenty-seven days, and it doesn't come. So he knows something's wrong. And maybe some other people realize the same thing. So they tell their friends about it, and their friends decide not to send away for our stuff. Then--"

"Hold it. What friends? This stuff goes to people who are lonely. They can't have too many friends."

He shifts his weight to the other foot. "Well, I mean the few friends they *do* have, or just neighbors at least. The word gets around that the numbers on the table are wrong. So we get fewer orders for our mailings. Then the bosses downstairs start to wonder and maybe call in some marketing experts, and how those experts find out about the buffalo I don't know for sure, but believe me, they do. So then, after we use up these few million tables, they'll have new ones printed with the right numbers. And the important thing is we don't get in any hot water." He taps the envelopes into a neat stack. "You see, the world corrects itself, just like an organism. It has what you might call an organic sense."

After he walks away, I sit back in my chair and look out my filthy window. Through the grime I see a drunk has made himself comfortable amid the garbage. Above, the sky is dark enough for rain. At least, it looks that way.

WAREHOUSE WORKER'S DREAMS

Forced Retirement

Every day that I have been here, I have sat at the long table opposite Andrew in the third-floor lunch room. He is a dark-skinned immigrant, 66 years old, skinny, with bony, cadaverous features but still strong and fit for hard work.

Every day he eats one of his two sandwiches at morning break. Every day he lights up a cigarette thereafter. Every day he looks out the window silently at the cars on the highway. And one minute before the end of the break he will remark, "One more minute, I guess." And after that minute he gets up and returns to the warehouse.

One day, watching Andrew eat his sandwich, I ask him, "Andrew, when are you going to retire?"

"Retire?" He smiles. "Why should I retire?"

"Wouldn't you prefer to stay home and enjoy your remaining years?"

He shakes his head, grinning. "I would be bored, man." He takes the last bite of his sandwich and crumples the wax paper and puts it back in his lunch bag.

"You mean you have nothing else to do besides this job?"

He lights his cigarette. "No. What would I do?"

"Well, don't you have any outside interests?"

"What kind of outside interests?"

"Jesus, I don't know--any kind."

He shakes his head and looks out the window.

"Don't you want to enjoy your life?" I continue, starting to feel a little frantic.

"I had my fun when I was young. Now I'm used to working. It helps pass the time."

"What are you going to do, work till you drop dead?"

"Probably. I don't mind. You got to die someday, man." He looks at his watch. "One more minute, I guess." He takes a few hasty puffs on his cigarette.

I get up and go to the window behind him. "I'd better close this. Tom said he wants it closed when we leave... Gee, it's stuck. I can't move it. Andrew, give me a hand

with this window...Try pulling it down on the outside. I'll pull on the inside..."

It happens very quickly. I shove Andrew over the sill, and as he screams I push his legs out. There are other screams behind me, and co-workers rush to the window, but it is too late. Andrew has been retired.

Tracking Down Bad Ideas

"You sent for me, sir?" I stand before the boss with dirty clothes and hands. I have just unloaded a truck and emptied the garbage.

"Indeed I did, Art." He leans back in his swivel chair. "Do you know what's wrong with this world?"

"Uh..."

"I'll tell you. It's bad ideas. Bad ideas hurt the world. Good ideas help the world. Right?"

"Uh...Sure, I guess."

"Bad ideas hurt this company too, just like they hurt the world. But I can't spend my time looking for them because I'm busy thinking up good ideas, like how to save two percent on cardboard. You see what I'm getting at?"

"Uh..." I'm thinking very hard. "Not exactly, sir."

"Well, I'll tell you. You finished high school, didn't you?"

"Almost. I almost finished the eleventh grade, actually."

"That's good enough. I want *you*..." (He points to me like Uncle Sam) "...to go after bad ideas in this company."

"You mean in the warehouse?"

"All over. But the warehouse is okay for a start." He opens a drawer and pulls out a large manila envelope. "Find out everything you can about bad ideas and put your findings in this envelope. When it's full, bring it to me, and we'll talk."

"You mean...you want me to, uh...that is, you mean while I'm working?"

"Forget your usual work. Just do this. Just walk around and look for bad ideas."

"Walk around?"

"Yes, that's right. It's nothing difficult. I'm sure you can do this. Now, off you go."

I leave the office, envelope in hand, and walk slowly through the warehouse. Not wanting to be seen standing around, I walk down to the last aisle, where the oldest remainders, damaged books, and out-of-print books are kept. Rarely does anyone come down here. I can think about my assignment for a while.

As I am thinking about my recent conversation, trying to understand it, I notice the stack of books directly in front of me at eye level. I don't think I've ever actually looked at them before. The dust and cobwebs are evidence that they have not been touched in a long time. I pick up the top one and blow some of the dust off. It is a vanity press book titled *Whaddya Say, Egon? -- An Original Musical Play About the Wacky, Wonderful Life of Egon Schiele*. I open the book at random and see a song lyric:

*Oh, Ee-gon, Ee-gon
With egg on your face
The pictures you been painting
They are such a disgrace...*

One For All

Coming back after the Christmas weekend, I am rested and ready to face my job anew. But I have heard the company is in trouble. They tell me business was way down compared to last Christmas. Now I'm wondering what will become of us. There might be layoffs. No raises as promised. No more free coffee. Is it fair that we must all suffer for circumstances beyond our control?

I am clearing my work counter when I notice Vinnie, the shipper, come into the warehouse. When he removes his woolen cap, I see that his right ear is covered with a thick bandage. The other workers are clustering around him, looking at his bandage, shaking hands with him. Someone is hanging up his coat for him, and someone else is bringing him a coffee. Vinnie jokes with them, and they give him looks of admiration.

As I am puzzling over the meaning of this scene, the foreman comes up to me. "Hi. Have a good holiday?"

"Yeah. Hey, what happened to Vinnie? Did he have an

accident?"

"Um...I have to explain something to you. For the coming year you'll be obliged to treat Vinnie with the greatest respect."

"Oh...Did I do something to offend him?"

"No, no, not at all. It's just that we have a custom here. When the company is having hard times, we don't want everyone to suffer for it...Uh, this is hard for you to understand as a newcomer, and believe me, it doesn't happen very often. Maybe once every few years, and actually it's considered an honor...That is, you mustn't think Vinnie was forced into it. He wasn't..."

"Forced into what?"

The foreman hesitates. "Into...making a small sacrifice...a symbolic gesture...an offering, like...to take upon himself the suffering for all of us..."

My brow is knitted in impatience and dawning alarm.
"What are you trying to say?"

"He had his goddam ear cut off!" he blurts out and then walks away.

Taken Away From All This

Occasionally one sees a lady truck driver, but the one from Metro Express is unbelievably beautiful. I watch for her truck constantly, and whenever she arrives to make a delivery, I rush to the receiving dock to speak to her. I discover that she shares my tastes in books and music, that she is single, and very liberal in her attitudes. Her name is Cathy.

I become obsessed with her. If only I had the courage to ask her out. Surely she knows I'm not an average warehouse worker. She seems to like me. Perhaps...?

Days pass and she does not appear. I curse myself for having missed my chance. She has awakened in me a new thirst for life. I never wanted this lousy job anyway!

Then one day she is back. I raise the door of the dock. "Listen," I say, "I want to come with you. I'm gonna leave this job right now, right this minute."

She smiles and shrugs. "Well, okay. If you want to."

I unload the few cartons for the company, close the door behind me, and hop into the truck with her. "Take me

away from all this!" I exclaim, laughing.

She laughs with me. "You picked the right time. This is my last day of work too. I've saved up all the money I need, so I can quit and have my operation."

"Operation? Are you sick?"

"No, no!" she says, as we pull out of the driveway. "I'm having my sex changed. I'm going to become a man."

Lucky To Be Here

I am in the boss's office. "Mr. Glanders, I'm getting a little tired of my job. Can't you put me on something else?"

Mr. Glanders puts down his pen and smiles sympathetically. "My boy, we have been through this before. There is no other job I can give you."

"Well, I'm thinking of leaving. It's getting so I hate to get up in the morning and come to work."

The boss gets up and beckons me to the window. He raises the Venetian blind. "Look down there," he says. I look down at the intersection. "You see those young fellows standing on the corner?"

"Uh huh." I see several figures shivering in the cold wind, attempting to offer something to passersby--pamphlets or something.

"Those are writers and poets," says the boss. "They are trying to sell their works. I watch them every day. Rarely do they make a sale, yet they are out there day after day out of sheer stubbornness, attempting to make a few dollars. They have no financial security and probably live like paupers. They probably don't eat much, and you can tell their clothes aren't warm enough. They probably don't even have life insurance or hospital insurance, and they could never obtain a credit card. And on top of that they humiliate themselves publicly by standing on the street like beggars, expecting other people to take pity on them and buy their juvenile scribblings." He pats my shoulder for emphasis. "That, my boy, is what comes of being without honest work--a lifetime of insecurity. You must not make such a mistake, especially with unemployment worse than ever before. Here you have gainful employment. You earn a salary. You have security as long as you want it. And while you're

here, you'll be contributing to society. You'll be able to pay your bills, your rent, feed yourself, clothe yourself, and put a little in the bank for your golden years." He lowers the Venetian blind. "I hope you see things more clearly now."

"Yeah...well..." I have my hands in my pockets. The feel of loose change weakens my resistance. "Yeah, I guess a boring job is better than no job."

"That's the spirit!" The boss smiles.

I go back down to my work table in the basement stock room and resume my job--painting exaggerated white lips on 6,000 little black plastic cannibals for the gift shop at Nigger World.

FILLING ORDERS IN ALBANIA

I was proud to be the first order filler in Albania. George, my foreman, said we'd be a great team. He was the first foreman in Albania.

From the window of the third-floor stockroom in downtown Tirana, he gestured with a sweep of his arm. "Albania used to be great. Now it's not so great. But we make it great once more."

Our first order came up the pneumatic tube. George took it out and unfolded it with official care. "Ahem, let's see. Ah, yes. It's from Peter Gamoukian's General Store, our best customer--so far. Here. You fill it. I supervise."

I took the order with a little wooden cart stolen from the post office and headed for the correct row of bins. The sound of the defective wheels set a little song going in my head, which I am proud to say I made up with no help at all:

Filling orders in Albania

It's a new kind of mania

Filling orders in Albania

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

My order sheet had been processed by the first Kardex clerk in Albania and put through the first computer in Albania. It read as follows:

1 goatskin

1 belt

1 shoo polish

1 cheez

1 bred

1 rock, big

2 cloth, green

1 gun, 45.

Luckily, there was exactly the right amount of merchandise in the bins, except for the gun. "George, there is no gun."

George coughed. "Oh, really? We must be out of stock. Just mark it 'O.S.' and we back-order it."

I wheeled back the cart and packed the goods in a cardboard carton. George supervised my every move. "You do

good work. I tell the agency they send me a good order filler." I smiled. He went on, "Ah, yes, someday Albania be great again. Soon I bring two girls from my village--one for you and one for me. In a few generations we have a master race." I felt historical.

"Any more orders to fill?" I asked.

"Not yet. Business slow at first but maybe better tomorrow. Here. You deliver the carton. We have no shipper. Number forty-five, Alley of the Jackals. Tell Peter Gamoukian hello from me. Come right back."

I was out the door and in the street in no time, my blue order filler's uniform and cap still crisp and new beneath the mid-summer sun. Bearded men slipped furtively into shadows and women disappeared into shops as I walked along. A slow-moving truck, loaded with the latest hybrid non-clucking chickens, passed me. I saw a crate stenciled 'P. GAMOUKIAN, 45 ALLEY OF JACKALS.' I jumped on the back and watched the main street roll itself out beneath my feet like a drab, old carpet.

The hum of the motor and the noise of the slightly defective wheels made me think of my little song. I turned to the silent chickens and sang to them softly:

*Filling orders in Albania
It's a new kind of mania
Filling orders in Albania
Quack, quack, quack.*

SCENARIOS

Renaming the Parkway

My colleague is angry with me as we leave the meeting room. "This is the craziest thing you've ever done! What a jerk you are!" He shakes his head as we get into the elevator. I try to suppress my smile, which would only aggravate him. As we reach the parking level he says, "Whatever possessed you to put such a name in the hat?"

"I don't know. I just felt like it. I didn't expect it to be picked out of fourteen names."

"Well, it got picked! And now we all look like assholes because of it!" We get in the car. He drops me off every afternoon. His mind is working the event over. "They're going to have to put it on all the maps and everything. Oh, God."

"You're mad, huh?"

"No, I'm angry. You're mad."

He is silent all the way to the ramp of the Pleasant Valley Parkway--a beautiful parkway, beloved of an entire city, running through a ravine with a lazy stream and beautiful trees on one side and modern townhouses and high-rises on the other.

"This was a thing of beauty!" he spits at me. "And you have ruined it! I hope you're proud of yourself!"

Indeed, I am proud. As of midnight, and for the next ten years, this road shall be called Hot Pus Parkway.

Essay

I am required to write an essay on Herodotus. I cannot write it. I have only one line: "At the underpinning of the world there must lie something solid." But it is useless to go on.

Suppose I were to write the world's greatest essay on Herodotus, an essay so insightful, so acute, so thorough, so unassailable that there would be nothing left to say about him forever? Would the world be any better off? Would I be any better off? Would anything be gained by such scholar-

ship? No. Therefore, I refuse to waste my time.

I shall go to my instructor and lay these reasons before him. He will surely see my logic, though it be painful to him.

I am nervous as I approach the classroom. For once in my life, I am going to speak my mind, and words shall not fail me, and I shall speak the truth, which shall be beyond argument.

I walk in. He is at the blackboard. Four small children with crayons and colored paper are sitting far apart among dozens of empty desks. The sun is pouring in, symbolizing my Truth.

"Sir, I have not done my essay on Herodotus! I have thought it all out very carefully, and I have decided that there is no--"

"ARE YOU GONNA GIVE ME THAT SHIT AGAIN?"

A Difficult Assignment

I am on the 8th Ave. Queens IND westbound. With me is an old Turkish woman dressed in black with a shawl around her head. The hairs on her dress are probably donkey hairs. There is not a word out of her. She knows just enough English to understand that I am pissed off about getting stuck with her.

I have a manila envelope bearing my orders. It is my worst assignment yet, and I have to get it done within seven years--or else! Maybe she won't even live that long. Even if she does, I probably couldn't even get her past simple arithmetic.

Sutphin Blvd.

I'd have to establish a firm basis in simple math. Then decimals and ratios and fractions. (There is a young couple across the aisle, arms around each other. They are giggling and teasing one another, looking deeply into each other's eyes.)

Van Wyck Blvd.

Of all the rotten jobs to get stuck with in the prime of life. Oh, God, how to get this stupid halvah-head even to first-order equations! No way. (*Go on, smooch away, lovebirds. Your lives are your own.* Nice blonde, that one. Good body. And as for him, I'll bet he didn't even finish

high school.) Negatives. I have to get negatives across to her. The number line. Cartesian coordinates. Functions. Union Turnpike.

If I can get her to first-order within five years, I could get her to quadratics in the sixth and cubics in the seventh. But that's cutting it close. (Now she's squeezing his thigh and he's tickling her rib. I wonder if they're going to his place or hers? First, dinner, then maybe a little dope, some music, and then... You don't know what burdens some of us have to bear. No, not you. You're lucky. You can do what you want. You're not stuck with this shitty job. You wouldn't know what it's like to have to work for a boss like mine. You don't have to see your life hacked away in large pieces while you get older and more miserable! You don't have to face seven years of unrelieved frustration!)

Continental Avenue--Forest Hills.

I drag the old hag up toward the door, shouting at the lovers, "YOU DON'T HAVE TO TEACH THIS STUPID BITCH ALGEBRA UP TO CUBIC EQUATIONS!"

A Dream and the Sale of Sharp Rocks

...Like no other, with skin like perfect cream, and I am flying through space with them, protected by Love and Grace, and these angels have promised to stay with me forever. Music fills the Universe, choruses unlike any I have heard before, singing pure tones, and I am coming to join them in the Kingdom. Yes, they have chosen me to live with them and experience with every cell of my body Joy and Pleasure no other mortal has known. I am floating on perfect confid--

RRRING!...RRRING!

"H'lo?"

"Your wake-up call, sir. It's seven-thirty."

"Oh...Okay."

I have my feet on the earth again, on durable Holiday Inn carpet. Reality. I am sorry to give up my dream, but I must be in Timmins by nine-thirty to sell sharp rocks wrapped in cellophane to the Roman Catholic Separate School Board.

I take my samples, catalogues and order sheets, get a donut and coffee from the restaurant and get in the car. It

is a cold morning in Reality and I am driven by Duty.

When I reach Brother Stephen's office, I find him asleep, head on hands, his bald head resembling an egg with a fringe of hair around the sides.

I knock on his door. "Brother Stephen?" I knock again.

He grunts, then looks up, reaching for his glasses. "You have brought *The Eye Creatures*, with John Ashley and Cynthia Hull?"

"No, no. It's Ed Sisyphus of Educational Rocks, Ltd."

He focuses on me. "Oh, so it is. I'm sorry. I thought you were the film distributor."

On Speaking Terms at Last

The old German couple at the laundromat never speak to me. When I need change, I hold up a dollar, and the old man knows what I want. When I say, "Thank you," he does not say, "You're welcome." She is the same way. I cannot absolutely swear that they have never spoken to me, but that is the impression I have.

One day I am waiting for my wash and reading the biography of Magritte. I am alone. The man comes over to me. He looks worried. He says to me, "You smart boy?" He always sees me reading. "You come in back a minute." He leads me toward their living quarters, in which I have sometimes seen them silently eating grey soup out of chipped, yellow bowls. "You look my wife a minute, okay? I afraid to call doctor."

He leads me beside their bed. The sight of his wife is nauseating. Her night dress is pulled up to her navel. She has a black bush. I am ashamed to look. She is a pile of grey and yellow fat with Amazons of blue veins on her legs. The room is hot. She smells. I feel smothered.

"What you can do for my wife?" the man asks me. I notice several whips and strange wooden and iron implements leaning against the dresser. I start to say something, to ask to be excused.

The wife says to him, "Ich möchte einen Fusspfleger."

He answers, "Dieser Mann ist ein Mechaniker."

He leaves me alone with her. I am frightened. She grabs my hand and pulls me. I resist. She wants to pull me

into bed. I reach into my left pocket and extract a quarter. "Can I have two dimes and a nickel?" "You dry for free today," she says.

Fortuitous Exchange

A man with a heavy accent--possibly Portuguese--has called about my ad in *Buy & Sell*. He is coming over to buy my scenarios. I had nearly given up hope. Scenarios written under penicillin have a limited demand.

The man arrives. He is thick, swarthy, and quite ugly. His daughter is with him. What a contrast! She is about twelve--a veritable little goddess, blonde, fair, with large, blue eyes and an exquisite face, tall for her age and regally slim. I am fairly swooning from the sight of her! She whispers in his ear.

He says to me, "My daughter, she is very tired. Can she lie down?"

"Yes, in the bedroom." I point. The father directs her there. She closes the door.

The man sits down at the table and picks up the sheets of paper, rubbing his brow with his big paws. "I tell you ...I almost give up hope to find some scenarios from the penicillin."

"Well, actually, I can't guarantee that they have any special value. I mean, they were written while I was taking penicillin, but I can't guarantee--"

"Yes, yes, this I understand. I need them."

"You do?"

"Yes, for my illness."

"Oh? What kind of illness?"

"I tell you. You see, if I forget something, I never remember it again. Is impossible to remember...I forget? POOF! Like that! Gone for good!" He makes a sweeping motion with his arm.

"Gee, that sounds pretty bad."

He nods. "Very bad. I losing everything. I losing my business, losing everything. My wife die last year because I get lost on way to hospital."

I am silent for a moment. "And my scenarios will cure you?"

He sighs. "Maybe someday I no forget no more or not so

much. But to remember, no, nothing help. Doctors tell me. If I forget, is too bad for me. Maybe your scenarios, I put them in my brain and keep what I have left. You understand?"

"Yes," I answer, although I do not understand at all.

The man attempts to tell me something about his life, but he is not able to explain it coherently. He has lost huge spans of time from his memory, and the gaps are ever-widening.

Finally he folds my scenarios and puts them in his pocket. He gets up and begins chattering away trivialities, and he seems so friendly I hate to interrupt him to remind him of the money--one hundred dollars--which I badly need. He is at the door when I manage to say, "The money."

"Yes, I try these first, then I send the money." Foolishly, I nod okay. He goes out and heads for his car. What does he mean, try them out first? He is driving off. Oh, hell, what have I done? I've let him take my scenarios without paying me! He'll never remember to pay! It's too late to--

Wait a minute! Oh, my God!

My belly floods with an adrenalin chill! He's forgotten his daughter!

TINTED DATA

The survey was nearly complete. Nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine persons had answered the question, "What's on your mind?"

Around midnight in a nearly empty bus terminal, a survey-taker approached the ten-thousandth person, held up the mike of the cassette recorder, and asked the question.

The man, unshaven, stringy-haired, poorly dressed, of indeterminate age, carrying a shopping bag of unpopular organ meats, screamed, "HOT SHIT! HOT SHIT! HOT FESTERING BALLS OF SHIT!" The survey-taker asked him to be more specific, whereupon the man repeated the answer, jumping up and down for emphasis. Spittle flew from his lips. "HOT SHIT! HOT SHIT! HOT SHIT!" Then he walked out of the terminal, throwing angry looks at the survey-taker.

The survey was now complete.

The survey-taker took a bus across town, walked one block to a Ukrainian bakery, walked up a flight of stairs to the door of an apartment on top of the bakery, unloaded the cassette recorder, dropped the cassette and her clipboard into a cardboard box already nearly full of cassettes and clipboards beside the door, walked down again, took a taxi to the airport, and took the first available flight to Pittsburgh, where she resumed her usual life as a kindergarten teacher.

On the door of the apartment where she had delivered her data was painted the name BEAN CONTROL in fading white letters.

Like a germ, the tainted data entered the System. It incubated in the box for nine hours, then in transit in the trunk of a limousine, and finally for several more hours on a desk in the corner of a furniture warehouse, waiting to be processed by a specialist.

At a climactic time--4:30, or possibly 4:52--a call was made. Then a chain reaction of calls. An ominous voice spoke to an ominous ear: "We have a problem."

A meeting was called for the following day. A group of eight men whose identities were known only to each other

assembled in a luxurious office on the thirteenth floor of a building--a floor not even mentioned on the elevator buttons. The men sat down at a long, rectangular table. At the head of the table sat the Most Important Person. Behind him were shelves jammed with brown, somber books, folders of statistics, and rolled-up charts. Beside the shelves were four framed diplomas with illegible ornamental lettering and a photo of the Most Important Person shaking hands with a municipal official he had later killed accidentally in a game of quoits.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it is our very understanding that is in jeopardy. Powers, schedules, and eager people have been frozen on the brink of action by this monstrous calumny, this horrendous irrationality, this...this..." He held up the cassette, hand shaking with rage. "This stupid answer by some shithead!" (It was true. At that very moment, two camouflaged dairy trucks, an armored car, and a moped stood idling in an underground garage in Passaic, their operators gulping endless cups of coffee and waiting for a yellow light overhead to go on.)

"Sir, the survey-taker had no business approaching someone in a bus terminal. She should have stayed within--"

"No, no, no," said another. "We went through all that in our preliminary studies. The standard deviation does not vary according to--"

"Those studies used an insufficient sample--"

"No, no, no, I'm sorry. You're entirely wrong--"

Their words mixed in the air like confetti.

"Gentlemen!" said the Most Important Person, commanding silence with his look. He spoke deliberately. "The program was to have taken all anomalies into consideration. This response, however, does not compute. Now, we cannot arbitrarily eliminate the data because it would be improper to do so. Besides, I don't feel like wasting the weekend dividing all the raw scores by nine thousand, nine hundred, and ninety-nine instead of ten thousand. It is not neat. And as you know, we have always stood for neatness." A member of the group thought of his underwear and felt guilty.

"Anyway, I had hoped to maintain the purity of our data because of what's at stake here. That's why I ordered the use of tape recordings instead of written data. Eliminates one source of human bias and error. Unfortunately, despite it

all, we are faced with the possibility of having to scrap the whole survey." The members of the group looked anxious. To scrap the survey would be unthinkable. "So, I have decided to call in...*the Man From Montana.*"

Expressions of amazement passed between the members. The Most Important Person was pleased with the effect of his words. You had to be very important indeed to be able to get in touch with the Man From Montana.

And at that moment--principally because it suits my purpose--the door opened to reveal a curly-haired, middle-aged, slightly flabby man, clad only in a red bathing suit. He was still dripping wet.

They all stood.

"It's all right. Sit down," he said. "I had to leave the semi-finals of the Rosicrucian Swimming Meet, but then ..." He grinned. "We all know what's at stake here, don't we?" He took the empty chair at the other end of the table and sat down with a wet squish. He addressed the Most Important Person, whom I'm tired of designating as such and so shall refer to as Phil, even though I'm not one of those privy to his real name: "Play that tape, won't you, Phil?"

"Certainly. I have it right here." Phil turned on the cassette player:

"...More art programs for the delinquents and also--"

"Ahem. Have to skip ahead a bit. Okay, here it is."

"HOT SHIT! HOT SHIT! HOT FESTERING BALLS OF SHIT!..."

Could you be more specific?...HOT SHIT! HOT SHIT! HOT SHIT!"

Click.

The Man From Montana poured himself a glass of water from the nearest pitcher. He was smiling. "I believe the data can be reconciled." He took a sip, making eye contact with Phil all the while.

At that instant something flew past the window and was noticed by one of the group, who had once crippled an ornithologist during a game of shuffleboard. "Good Lord! An ichthyornis!" Phil shot a fierce look at the man, who apologized to the Man From Montana. "Excuse me. Please go on."

The latter smiled indulgently. "The response," he said, "could possibly...be interpreted...as an expression of interest...in sewage treatment technology."

Phil was amazed. "I never thought of that! You mean it?"

"Well, the way I see it, it's your only out. I would estimate the probability at about fifty percent, possibly a little better than that. Of course, you'll have to undertake a Semantic Differential Study."

Phil sighed. It would mean much more work, but it would have to be done to save the survey. All the data had to be reconciled.

The Man From Montana continued, "In such cases as these we are ultimately led to the fundamental question, 'What is the meaning of meaning?'"

"Ooh! Ooh! I know! I know! Ask me! Ask me!" exclaimed one of the group, waving his hand frantically.

"No, I was speaking rhetorically." The other sank back in disappointment. "If the Semantic Differential Study affirms the respondent's terminology in, say, ten percent of the cases, I think you can allow it."

"But what about the sample?" asked Phil. "We don't know the respondent's socio-economic profile, or his--"

"Yes, yes, I understand that. But you see, that's your fudge factor. That's where you can rig it a little to raise your odds."

Phil and the Man From Montana smiled. They understood each other as only True Professionals can.

The Man From Montana was nearly dry. He stood up. "I think it will work out for you. If it doesn't, it'll be awfully sticky. But I think Bean Control can knock the data into line." He pushed his chair back in place. "One last thing, of course. My fee is eight million dollars."

"Certainly. I'll see to it today," said Phil.

The Man From Montana gave a folksy wave to the group and left the room. Phil was again the most important person in the room. Pens and pads appeared at the ready.

"All right. There's no time to lose. We've got an SDS to run." He singled out two of the members. "This is a job for Tiger Team, with support from Moose Team. I want our best outside people brought in on this--Greta from Seattle, Sid from Bangor, the Wiseman twins, Harry's Uncle Dave, and what's-his-name, that dentist in the Henry Hudson Hotel who saved our necks with the homing pigeons..."

EXCERPTS FROM MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

My Posthumous Fame

I intended to write a novel in which a character's life is unfolded over the course of 600 pages and the reader identifies with him irresistibly. Then some soldiers burst into his home and crush his skull with their rifle butts. The reader comes to hate the authority the soldiers represent. Such incitement of hatred against the government at a time when the national unity is threatened leads to a criminal charge against me. The trial catapults me to fame, whether or not I am found guilty.

Excuse me, but I was only daydreaming. In fact I did not write that novel. Instead I decided to write a two-page prose piece called "A Dead Character," in which I presented the character, established empathy in a few short paragraphs, and then had a bunch of soldiers barge in and crush his skull. The story would have been a good one, suitable for school anthologies.

Unfortunately, the story has not yet been completed, although I have approximately 600 pages of notes.

Following an untimely death (I choked to death of rage in a crowded subway), mention is made of me in a book titled *CanLit -- Gentle Trillium and Stout Maple*, by John Robert Colombo. Colombo is categorizing writers according to the Gentle Trillium school (nationalists) and the Stout Maple school (internationalists). Because I belonged to neither school, he puts me in a footnote:

"Kildney's writing must be judged on the basis of very few works, since he never got beyond the idea stage most of the time. He never did write that 600-page novel or even that two-page story, which forces us to conclude that he was simply unable to do so. Thus, Kildney's reputation never got much beyond the Borough of North York, and we shall not consider him further."

In the second edition of the book, the footnote is dropped entirely.

The Wheat Sheaf Six or Seven

Feeling inadequate because of my obscurity, I decide to get a bunch of other obscure writers together to form a group. I would feel more adequate as part of a group, and biographers, critics, and the press are more interested in groups. There were *Les Six*, the French composers, and I'm sure there were some other famous groups with a number in their name.

So, at great expense, I arrange for several of my writer friends to come to Toronto. I bring up Tom Whalen from New Orleans, Jerry Underwood from Kansas, Barry Chamish from Jerusalem, Bruce Hutchinson (actually an artist) and Richard Grayson from Brooklyn, and J. Miller, who already lives here in Toronto, but I pay his streetcar fare anyway. I don't actually know J. Miller too well, but I figure two of us should be local boys at least. I have qualms about Grayson since he is too well known to be considered obscure, but I figure to exploit his reputation.

So we go into the Wheat Sheaf Tavern, which I have never been in before, though I don't admit it. I am immediately reminded how uncomfortable I have always felt in taverns. What a bunch of seedy characters! But I figure once we all sit around and get a good feeling of camaraderie (I think that's the word), we'll all feel pretty good. So we order some beers to prove we are regular guys even though we're writers. When the waitress brings them, I remark casually, "Heh heh, we're all writers, you know--soon to be famous. We're the Wheat Sheaf Six."

"I count seven," she says and goes away.

"Okay, the Wheat Sheaf Seven then. Makes no difference."

Whalen wants to know how far the university is. I tell him we're nowhere near it.

I ask Underwood to relate some of his painful experiences of Jewish childhood. "I don't feel like it now," he says, taking out a pack of Rolaids.

Chamish and Miller start swapping puns, which keeps the camaraderie going for about three minutes.

Grayson says, "I feel like a minor character in a story that's a bad imitation of one of my own, but I'm not complaining."

"What we need is a group photo for historical purposes," I say.

"I left my camera in the hotel room," says Underwood.

"I have a better idea. Bruce here can draw a quick drawing of us, like they do in courtrooms."

Hutchinson consents. He unfolds a napkin and draws an incredibly detailed drawing of the Wheat Sheaf Seven portrayed as grotesque insects seated at a Last Supper of turds in the middle of a Martian desert. That keeps the camaraderie going for a while. He says he will make photocopies when he gets a chance.

We all agree to exchange phone numbers and addresses and keep in touch because we are a group now and will want to get famous at approximately the same rate, if possible, so no one feels out of place. I hear some obscene language from the next table, but I'm sure it has nothing to do with us.

I pay for the beers because it was my idea, and we leave, but with a lingering feeling of camaraderie.

So this is how the Wheat Sheaf Seven got started. I've never been back there, though, because the thrill would never be the same.

Meeting Editorial Needs

In a marketing guide for writers, the editor of *The Slime Review* says, "We desire to see work that shows a timeless quality of whatever approach is taken, work that shatters the formalistic divisions of process and product, work that utters after bare attention the mystic word, work that is classical in its orientation to aesthetic problems, work that calls into itself the subliminal truths of the human experience." The editor goes on to say, "Those writers we publish invariably go on to big things."

For several weeks I engage my whole being to the task of meeting these editorial needs. At last I have a story, undoubtedly my best ever. It has all the qualities asked for by *The Slime Review*.

I am so proud of my story and so impatient to see it in print that I deliver it personally to *The Slime Review*. The neon sign on a downtown building identifies its offices. I go in and tell the receptionist I want to see Mr. Hyrax.

She tells me to take a seat. I sit down next to a deformed midget with a terrible body odor. "You write? Me, too," he squeaks.

Mr. Hyrax calls us both in. The midget and I hand him our stories. He reads the midget's story first. His name is Oswald Ozena. "Ozena, you're a genius!" Hyrax proclaims. "This is precisely what we need." Ozena blushes and smiles. "As for you, Mr....uh..."

"Kilodney."

"Well, Mr. Kilodney," he says, glancing at the first paragraph of my story, "it's quite obvious you don't have the dimmest idea of what we're looking for. You'll never get anywhere unless you understand editorial requirements." He hands me back my story. As I leave, I hear him invite Ozena out to lunch.

A month later, I note in the paper that Ozena has won *The Slime Review's* \$1000 annual award.

The following month, a major publisher announces a forthcoming book by "that brilliant writer discovered by Edmund Hyrax of *The Slime Review*, Oswald Ozena."

Several weeks later, Ozena and Hyrax appear on *The Today Show*.

Two months later, I pass Ozena and Hyrax on the street. Hyrax says to me with a smug grin, "My young protégé has just won the National Book Award for fiction."

Three months later, on my way back from the welfare office, I see Ozena and Hyrax in a restaurant with a major motion picture producer. Ozena signs a paper, and they all shake hands. Hyrax sticks his tongue out at me.

Soon thereafter, Ozena appears in *People Magazine* arm in arm with Bianca Jagger at a cocktail party, with Hyrax close by, chatting with a prominent newspaper columnist.

A few months after that, Ozena's second book, *Experiences of a Young Midget*, hits number one on the *New York Times* best-sellers list, and the movie promises to outgross *Star Wars*.

A month later, CBS's *Sixty Minutes* does a feature on "The Oswald Ozena Phenomenon," filmed at his newly-bought Beverly Hills mansion, where he is having a party with a hundred and fifty of the most glamorous people in show business and the arts.

With my last stamp, I decide to write Oswald Ozena a

letter. I write to him, "I was the guy you met in the waiting room of The Slime Review the day you had your story accepted. I just want to say congratulations and all the best for the future. It's encouraging to know success can come that quickly when you've got what it takes. I'm using my last stamp to write you this letter. I haven't sold a single story and I'm giving up writing for a while because I had to hock my typewriter to buy food. But I'll be back at it eventually, and maybe with a little luck, who knows, if you know what I mean. Sincerely, Crad Kildodney."

Two weeks later, I get back a polite, printed acknowledgment from the office of Mr. Hyrax, who is acting as Ozena's agent and handling "the flood of mail from fans everywhere, whom Mr. Ozena would like to thank individually but can't because of his busy schedule as a famous writer." Underneath the printed form letter, Hyrax has added a P.S. in his own handwriting: "You stupid son of a bitch, you'll never learn."

Kildodney on Kildodney

My greatest fantasy is fulfilled! I discover that I am actually on the curriculum of a Canadian lit course at a local community college. I enroll under another name. I will amaze the instructor with my perception and deep psychological insight.

My essay on myself reads in part:

"Kildodney's work is almost completely out of the mainstream of modern writing as he was not trained as a writer. His work is too internally logical to be considered surrealistic, yet too absurd to be considered realistic. He is too relevant to be a Dadaist, yet too esoteric to be a topical satirist. To merely call him an absurdist, as authorities generally do, is to believe in the 'absurd' and 'not-absurd' as absolute categories, which he would object to. So what is Kildodney? He is neither A, B, C, nor D. He is none of the above--a writer without a label, a freak perhaps, a boil on the face of literature."

I hand in my essay. It is very short--three pages. Everyone else has written ten to fifteen pages. I have read some of the other papers, and believe me, they are hopeless.

A few days later, the papers are returned. The

instructor compliments the class on their "generally cogent and meaningful analyses, with one or two exceptions." One of the exceptions is mine. He has given me a C. This is an outrage! This moron is teaching literature?

I go up to him after class. "Mr. Vives, I certainly don't deserve a C on this. Please have another look."

He takes the paper and speed-reads it. "Hmmm...hmmm... Yes, you're quite right." He changes my C to a D.

How I Improved Society

There are times when words are not enough. You have to do something. I had suffered from a mental block for a long time until I realized what I needed for emotional relief. I needed to kill someone. Not because I am naturally violent, mind you. No. I wanted to improve society by removing one or more of its worthless members.

I decided to warm up with some arson. I started a fire at the film censor board one snowy Sunday night. It was gutted.

I followed the Rev. Ken Campbell of Renaissance International into a parking lot and bashed his head in with a brick.

I heard two drunken teenagers on the subway platform bragging about "beating up Pakis," so I pushed them onto the tracks. One of them was electrocuted.

There was an old woman with a raspy voice at my company who would read the crime stories from the *Toronto Sun* out loud every day at coffee break, and the resulting discussion would always end with a call for capital punishment. So I put rat poison in her coffee, but she lived.

A Member of Parliament called for a crackdown on pornography, so I sent him a bomb, which killed him and his cat.

I asked directions of a well-dressed Toronto businessman in French, and he said, "Fuck off, frog." I took out a carving knife and slit his jugular vein.

A blind date told me her favorite TV program was *The Newlywed Game*. I tied her to her bed and raped her.

A job interviewer at Maclean-Hunter badgered me with questions about my nationality and military service record, so I squirted ammonia into his eyes and pushed him out the tenth-floor window.

A prominent Canadian publisher rejected my collection of stories, saying it was "*not sufficiently commercial to warrant our interest.*" I shot him in the head on his way home from work.

I am now serving 400 years for my crimes, with no parole before 175 years. The warden has allowed me to continue writing for publication on two conditions: first, that I state explicitly in every story I write that breaking the law is wrong, or crime doesn't pay, or something like that. So don't break any laws, folks. The second condition is that I cannot receive money for what I get published because we prisoners are not permitted to "engage in a business or any enterprise for monetary gain." And besides, it would hamper my eventual rehabilitation and return to society as a writer to be paid for something I wrote. I expect to find the outside world much as I left it 175 to 400 years from now.

THE WINDOW

Inside it is hot and my work clothes are wet with perspiration. We are here because our little lives have led us here. We can stand by the window and blow out the smoke of forbidden cigarettes along with whatever feeble thoughts we can manage to think.

Outside it is mid-summer, but a refreshing breeze is blowing off the lake. It carries to us the smells of freshly-cut flowers brought in from the country in the cattle cars standing in the C.N. yard. It is not the dismal universal hiss of the city that fills our ears but bird songs and rustling branches and gurgling streams. The horizon is filled not with warehouses, high-rises, and hydro-electric cobwebs but the mountains and forests and all the geological oddities we grew up to see. Somewhere out there is our favorite picture postcard--heaven on earth.

The window is the stage at which our inner voices struggle to articulate themselves, to get the message across. They are heard faintly for a moment, then are gone, spilled out in pieces into the world. Now we are poor again, for we have forgotten them already.

The boys have been given brooms and told to sweep. How forlorn they look, as if they'd been told to sweep the world. And they would, too, if it were once only. They will miss the dust under the bins, as usual. No process save the end of the world is likely to remove it.

Here are books for children, but I have come to despise their silly faces. *Beezus* and *Ramona* seem to mock us for serving other people's childhoods while betraying our own. *Frog and Toad* are no longer our friends but conspirators in our eventual collapse. *Pop-Up Jesus*, our light and hope, has been sent back by the stores for defective covers.

My co-workers drag themselves through the days as best they can. At times I see the expressions on their faces and wonder if I look that way. Does anyone have the courage to say out loud that he is thoroughly beaten?

I found a scrawl on an I-beam over the mezzanine where the globes are kept: *Richard C. Smith, Jan 8/72*. Where is Richard C. Smith now? He is dead. The shelves and books

and brooms have forgotten him, as they will forget us. The world has no memory built into it--not even the furnished rooms we give the precious years of our lives to. We are already dead to the world.

Outside, the billboard girl is waiting to see me in the Bahamas. Behind her on the beach is Céline with a beach ball and many friends. A change of latitude was all that was needed.

The sun has dipped behind the Wheat Sheaf Tavern. The streets and trams are now full of people passing quickly through short stories. There is evidence of gainful employment and a great amount of civilized activity. A man stands at the window, trying to understand it all.

IN LIMBO...

A ball point pen may be the chain that binds you to your job, the gestation period of a buffalo may be reduced to twenty-seven days, the boss's toes may determine your promotion, and a window may frame the picture of your desolation.

You may be sent to a Sunoco station to sing a stupid song, into the warehouse to search for bad ideas, to Timmins to sell cellophane-wrapped rocks to the Catholic School Board, or on an arcane research mission for that mysterious agency, BEAN CONTROL.

You may break new ground in Albania, meet The Man From Montana, witness the rise to fame of a midget with body odor, become involved against your will with the silent couple who run the laundromat, or be tempted by a beautiful twelve-year-old girl.

You may even discover writers selling their works on the street!

GAINFULLY EMPLOYED IN LIMBO, Crad Kildney's third collection of stories, is the long-awaited sequel to WORLD UNDER ANAESTHESIA (Charnel House, 1979). Kildney fans will find more of the bizarre, devastating, ironic satire--from farcical to grim--that they have come to love.

"Crad Kildney is a literate crazy man in a mold of his own, and there's no one else like him in Canada." -- David Schatzky

"Kildney's style is unique, and there is no end to his inventiveness and originality." -- Stuart Ross, York University *Excalibur*